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MADNESS AND ITS SOCIAL BACKGROUND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

-Topic Description-

Madness is a paradoxical topic between *physis* and *thesis*. Madness thrusts us within boundaries apparently defined by *nature*, hence creating Otherness. This feature has not escaped the notice of commentary which has focused on the cultural aspects of madness: "*One does not become mad by personal choice, culture has it all planned*," remarked Francois Laplantine.[1].

Undergoing the inevitable effects of the march of time, madness possesses its own history but has only recently become a 'subject' for historical research. Through the gradual conquest of two new fields of investigation, madness has "acquired" a relative and historical facet, which has warranted its incorporation in the area of the social sciences. This first took place through the recognition of cultural differences in mental illnesses, and secondly through the development of research dealing with the relationship between the notion of 'culture' and normality/abnormality. The beginnings of ethno-psychiatry in the works of Georges Devreux, as well as the sociology of mental illnesses as found in the works of Roger Bastide first shed light on the social conditioning of various forms of madness and its roots in various cultural settings. Each culture produces a specific nosology – this was the first major breakthrough.

However, cultures are not immutable, they evolve. The need for another perspective emerged; that of examining madness through the prism of time. History, in its own way, began to dominate this new field of research. The objective was not only to describe forms of cure or draw up the epidemiological charts of different eras, but rather to study the anthropological and philosophical bases for the definition of madness. Gradually, approaches in medicine and psychiatry were dropped as the realization grew that the term 'mad' involved a judgment on human nature, and that it primarily designated a social status. At the end of the 1960s a first historical synthesis was published in London. George Rosen's *Madness in Society* (1968) reviewed "psychopathology in its social context" from Antiquity to current times.

The publication of Rosen's book was one key date, but research in the field only began to expand rapidly with the publication in 1972 of Michel Foucault's well known *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. From then on, studies focusing on both the cultural and historical aspects of madness increased considerably. From articles to reference books, from history to cultural anthropology, 'the madman' and 'madness' became recognized topics in the social sciences and received growing scholarly attention. For instance a number of key monographs were published after long years of research. The first was the monumental work by Michael W. Doll, Majnun: *The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford, 1992). The author explains his interest in the subject as follows: "*The insane challenge our everyday assumptions about reason and normality and tests the bonds of social organisation*."[2] The stakes are high, as are the difficulties involved. This is because the researcher must not only define the subject – and madness is one of the most complex --- but also locate data, unearth source material and form a corpus. This is not an easy task and Michael W. Doll points out the obstacles to overcome: *"historical descriptions are rare", "texts are prescriptive rather than descriptive", "we possess a very imperfect understanding of insanity today*".[3] However, an approach to madness is feasible, as his book clearly shows.

Several other major works were devoted to a second important cultural area, classical Antiquity. The impressive *La maladie de l'âme* by Jackie Pigeaud is one example where the author examines *mania* in classical sources. His main goal was to demonstrate that the accepted idea of a separation in Greek and Latin writings between body and soul should be rejected since *mania* denotes, by its symptoms, both physical and psychic suffering.

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[1] François Laplantine, *Anthropologie de la maladie,* Paris 1986, p.32.

[2] Michael Doll, *op.cit.*, Introduction, p.1.

[3] Ibidem, Introduction, passim.

Greek sources provide ample material for the study of madness. The sources are plentiful and the terminology is more systematic than elsewhere. This accounts for the increase in studies, varying in scope, aimed at better capturing the specificity of this phenomenon. Among these works, Ruth Padel's works deserve mention, in particular *In and Out of the Mind, Greek Images of the Tragic Self* (Princeton, 1992) and *Whom Gods Destroy. Elements of Greek and Tragic Madness* (Princeton, 1995) where the various facets of the individual, the self and alienation are analyzed in great detail. Padel describes the guiding principle of her analysis in the following way: *"The book is built round three images that dominate Greek representations of madness: darkness, wandering, and damage "*. Padel's work is not solely unidirectional, from the researcher to Greek culture, but reverses the orientation by tracing Greek images of madness throughout the ages: "*to mark how Greek tragic madness struck later ages, and how these other ages (especially the Renaissance and the nineteenth century) changed the Greek picture*"[4]. This comment points to a major way in which our historical memory has been constructed, namely textual bias, or literature in the broad sense of the word. This component, *fiction*, which covers stylistic devices and places the narrative within a defined framework, must be taken into account when analyzing the data on the madman or madness.

This applies even more forcefully to the Old Testament, where exegesis has not always been concerned with this feature. In particular, in the field of Old Testament studies, discussions on madness have focused primarily on works dealing with Jewish medicine. Within this framework, the first comprehensive study was *Preuss's Biblische und Talmudische Medizin* (1911), which today is still used as a precious source of information. Preuss' approach was in particular that of a physician of his times, who proceeded to identify symptoms and make a diagnosis in terms of modern medicine. For instance, in the chapter on mental illness deals with the cases of Saul and Nebuchadnezzar, he considers that the former is suffering from "melancholia in its psychiatric sense" and "epileptic seizures" whereas the latter shows signs of "lycanthropy."[5] Secondly Preuss reviews the occurrences in the Bible of the Hebrew root [שגע , שגעון (madness) and [משוגע (madman), noting the connection with prophetic activity (נביא). Preuss' book bears more resemblance to an encyclopedia. He compiles information but does not conduct a detailed analysis of each passage he quotes. Another feature, reflected in the study that follows, is to use both biblical and talmudic sources. Although the amount of medical information in the Bible is small as compared to the Talmud, the major reason for combining them is to deal with Jewish culture as a whole, as a paradigmatic entity, disregarding chronological sequence. Often Biblical passages are clarified by quotations from talmudic sages or even medieval commentators, without critical analyses of these approaches.

This type of approach can be found in *Medicine in the Bible and the Talmud* by Franz Rosner (New York, 1977) and in Michel Granek's doctoral dissertation in medicine which deals precisely with my topic: *Le concept de folie dans la société juive traditionnelle* (University of Paris V, Rene Descartes, 1975). This dissertation is divided into two parts: the Bible and the Talmud. In Part I dealing with madness in the Bible, Granek presents his views through three case studies: Saul, David and Nebuchadnezzar. Although Granek states that he is not trying to *"translate the incisive descriptions made by the Talmud sages into symptoms or psychiatric syndromes*"[6] this is precisely what he does when studying Biblical cases. For instance, Saul oscillates between "persecution delirium" and a form of "melancholia" rooted in his personality: "*it is obvious for all the traditional Jewish scholars that Saul's sins play a major role in the onset of his madness.*"[7] David shows symptoms of epilepsy (1 Samuel 21.11ss) but he is feigning a true seizure; he pretends to save his life in front of Achish, the Philistine King of Gath. Nebuchadnezzar's transformation into an animal, described in chapter 4 of Daniel, derives from casuistic and zoanthropy. Granek concludes: "*The concept of madness in the Bible is hence closely tied to the concept of Good and Evil; God uses madness as a punishment to the guilty party. Madness is thus a necessity and this necessity is demonstrated to David. Nebuchadnezzar is struck down because of his overly developed pride, but once he recovers some of his humbleness, he is fully cured and restored to his original role; Saul continues to err and death alone is a deliverance and an absolution.*"[8]

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[4] Ruth Padel, *op.cit*. preface, p.XIII.

[5] Preuss, *op.cit*. pp.356-357.

[6] Granek, *op.cit.*, p.35.

[7] *Ibidem*, p.23.

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 30.

This study is practically the only systematic approach, although on a fairly small scale, to madness in the Bible. Other attempts at a synthesis of Jewish medicine refer briefly to behavioral malfunctions due to mental disorders. Paul Humbert, in *La maladie et medicine dans l'ancien Testament*[9], refers briefly to a "*sickness of the soul*" and a "*medication for the heart*". Donald J. Weisman, in an article entitled "Medicine in the Old Testament World"[10] gives an overview of Jewish medicine in the historical context of the Near East. He describes its ideal of health: to be perfect in body as well as in the mind, which presupposes a unity of being and harmony with the environment and with God. He includes a paragraph dealing with mental illnesses and even provides a terminology which he finds revealing: שגעון (madness); שממון – severe stupor (*Ez. 4.16; 12.19*); תמהון – bewilderment of the mind (*Deut. 28.28-29*); דאבון – anxious care (*Deut. 28.65*); עצבון – depression (*Gen.3.17*) [11]. On the other hand, aside from the terminology, Wiseman considers the following figures as clinical cases: Saul (suffering from a homicidal impulse and a suicidal tendency), David (hallucination or aggressive behavior), Eli (symptoms of manic depression with loss of appetite), Job (suspected schizophrenia), Nabal (cranial lesion), Jeroboam, son of the Sunnamite (oscillating between sunstroke, cerebral illness and meningitis) and Balam (on the basis of Babylonian texts, Wiseman detects epilepsy).[12]

The concept of health and its role in the construction of the human ideal in the Bible has also been studied by R.P. Bulka, in *Mental Health:Biblical and Talmudic Directives.*[13] Mental health is an integral part of the general state of well being and good humor is one of the obligations assigned to human beings. "*The Divine presence does not manifest itself in a spirit of melancholy. Basic Jewish lifestyle is actualised and affirmed in a spirit of optimism and joy rather than in a spirit of sadness and depression.*"[14]

The conclusion these three authors draw is that keeping the spirit healthy means above all avoiding depression. They however were only indirectly concerned with madness, in the sense that they defined its polar opposites – health, wellbeing and satisfaction. Other commentary can be found in various works on Saul, David, Nebuchadnezzar, or the prophets. However, as has been noted earlier, the remarks remain limited to the clinical point of view, and are aimed at identifying an illness and transposing a diagnosis.

To create an interface between the modern world, our concept of madness, and the Biblical approach to this issue, modern guidelines and understanding of the problem cannot be disregarded. Nevertheless an attempt should be made to find the right balance and avoid misinterpreting the data. The Bible is clearly not a medical treatise and despite its legal passages there is not, as would be the case later in the rabbinical literature, directives concerning madmen. However information on madness and portraits of madmen can be found in the Old Testament: almost an entire book is devoted to Saul, the unfortunate King tormented by an evil spirit. The book of Daniel describes the tribulations of King Nebuchadnezzar who was turned into an animal. In addition there are the rare but significant instances of terms connected to madness הון, התתוללשגעון, תמ with their corresponding derivatives. Do all of these occurrences have something in common, such that a definition or a norm can be formulated? Despite a number of intuitions, it is too early to provide a response. Case studies should precede the establishment of a generalization. The Bible provides a great deal of information as regards Saul and Nebuchadnezzar, the two figures who are considered to be insane in the literature. This particular facet of viewing them as "patients" contributing to literary work, has received much less attention. Saul and Nebuchadnezzar are above all 'mad king characters' and only secondly 'mad kings'. Thus the historical data contained in these stories shed light primarily on mentalities and only then on the real facts concerning the Israelites of the Bible. The key to a reading of these texts can be found in the narrative plot, in the stories' assumptions and issues, in repetitions and lexical choice.

Depending on the way in which questions are asked and data are extracted, the text on Saul lends itself to varying forms of categorization. It can be classified as a "story of kingship

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[9] Paul Humbert, "Maladie et medecine dans l'ancien testament" RHPR, 44/1964,pp.1-29.

[10] Donald J. Wiseman, "Medicine in the Old Testament World" in Bernard Palmer, *Medicine and the Bible,* New York 1986, pp.13-42.

[11] Wiseman, *op.cit*, p.26, n.71.

[12] *Ibidem*, p.27.

[13] R.P. Bulka, *Mental Health, Biblical and Talmudic Directives*, Koroth, vol. 6, 1988, pp.30-41.

[14] *Ibidem*, p.32.

foundation" or a "political transition story" or a 'Saul cycle', depending on whether the focus is on the institutional features or interpersonal relationships. The best way to approach the topic of madness is to take as the point of departure the description of the human person, the character of Saul as an individual, and only afterwards to look for a more global vision of his place in the political-institutional chain of events. It is obvious that a clear-cut division of the private and public domains does not fit with the vision in Antiquity, where the institution, in this case royal, lives through individual human beings and the acts of the king as individual have cosmic consequences. They become figures of power performing rituals to produce or even reproduce this power. This is best illustrated by King Saul himself, remembered as both "mad king" and "deposed king".

The Saul narrative is dominated by ambivalence and ambiguity. He is invested and then divested of his powers. These stages in his career are interwoven with signs that have a double meaning: the benevolent and malevolent spirit of god, the prophesy of his crowning and the prophesy of his fall, anger that spurs victory or anger that reveals defeat.

Saul's relationship to *ruah* is specific and can be analyzed in two registers: first of all the formative function of *ruah* as an indispensable feature of leadership, secondly the distracting function of *ruah* which is qualified as "bad". The case of Saul is unique from this point of view. No other king or political leader is exposed successively to these two forms of *ruah*. A more systematic formulation of this theological point of view is found in Isaiah 45.7:

> *I form light and create darkness*
> *I make weal and create woe*– (רע ובונה שלום עשה
> *I the Lord do all these things.*

The evil spirit, רעה רוח, that tormented Saul is conceptualized here. Yahve is the inspirer of wholeness – שלום– and malformation –רע . Like all the prophets, Saul lives in a shaky equilibrium: the negative side of inspiration can at any time override the positive side. This occurs in particular when the positive inspiration has not been completely integrated.

Saul's crowning as king also includes a prophetic incident and this same behavior will later be denounced when Saul insists on pursuing David, his chosen successor. In the crowning process, there is the period before the trance and the period after the trance. This becomes madness when the individual attempts to place himself in this transition zone, in the gap between the links in the chain. It is worth recalling that Saul is the best example of the transitional figure and his madness is symbolic of the inability to go beyond the phase of initiation. His faulty decision making can also be explained in terms of his inability to accept the prerogatives of a real leader. Interference in Samuel's area of authority is not only a ritual catastrophe but also an error of judgment:נסכלת "you acted like a madman.." because it is mad to remain a prophet when you need to be king. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" He should not be, but this sentence is the telltale sign of confusion. It insinuates that Saul's crowning as King has failed since Saul is neither one or the other: he remains in the breach.

The topos of fear similarly sheds light on Saul's behavioral defects. He is constantly out of step: he frightens when he should not and he is frightened when he should not be. He is afraid of a person he should not be afraid of (the people in 15.24, among others) and he does not fear the one he should fear (God on several occasions). Lastly he is legitimately afraid of the silence of God (28.15) but he does not fear God when he goes to the sorceress.

This is not a complete picture of the issues connected to Saul's madness but gives an overview of the Biblical approach to both madness and the investiture and divestiture of the king as a person.

The same concern, the fall of the individual as king, is the central focus of the story of Nebuchadnezzar.

> *Let his* heart *be altered from that of a* man*,*
> *And let him be given the* heart *of a* beast
> *And let seven seasons pass over him.*(Daniel 4.13).

The heart, in the Bible, לבלבב in Hebrew and לבב in Aramaic, designates the seat of reason and will, and at times of the emotions. Thus, in losing his "heart of man" Nebuchadnezzar is deprived of his ability to judge and discern. However the author does not stop at removing his "heart' through a literary phrase such as" לבב חסר– literally a "lack of heart", frequently found in the Proverbs. Rather, no void is left, and the king is attributed "the heart of a beast", giving his madness a concrete form. Man is transformed into a beast. Medical terminology has classified this type of behavior as lycanthropy. The stakes are however more profound, involving both

human and divine sovereignty. Their hierarchy is obvious to any 'healthy' spirit. When man attempts however to penetrate the divine domain and to usurp its authority, existence is disorganized. To recognize the normal state of affairs, Nebuchadnezzar needs to be placed in a world where the givens have been reversed.

The second part of the book, which scholars at times term Daniel B, where the narratives stops and is replaced by Daniel's visions, is guided by the same theme of sovereignty but on another register. In this way, a literary dialogue between two historical periods and two geographic locations is established. The commentators concur that the main target of Daniel's apocalyptic visions is the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes who prohibited worship in the Temple in Jerusalem. However it would be more appropriate to consider this portrait of the king as a whole, and to identify the prime focus of this portrait, namely, hubris and idolatry.

The Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel is at the crossroads of imagery. His personality draws on ancient Babylonian literary tradition which itself would be highly prolific. Numerous commentaries were written based on Daniel's work. It would be interesting to follow this trace through a few examples and to attempt to identify the function of this oft-renewed transmission of a literary and historical prototype. The way in which Nebuchadnezzar takes on the traits of Nabonide, transmits them to Antiochus IV Epiphanes and to Titus raises not only an issue in literary history but also in historical comprehension. Where does historiography finish and where does literature begin and what are the historical reasons for the literary constructions of the theme of the leader? Fiction is not only based on the imaginary but rather is constructed on fragments of historical memory and is also influenced by the most striking events in the unfolding of history, the 'real' one. From Nabonide to the Roman Emperors, the techniques used and the reasons for their use change. What brings all these cliches together is the sovereign's madness. The image is unusual since typically those in power attempt to de-legitimize their opponents by jettisoning them into the sphere of madness, where all efforts are pointless because they are baseless. For once the exception is not the rule.

I have tried to present a brief overview of the general issues in my doctoral dissertation, which have yet to have received definitive responses. Research is ongoing and constantly submitted to its maieutic. Not all the questions are relevant and some do not have an answer: the sorting process is currently being conducted. The process is laborious and necessarily paved with tests of objectivity and dialogue – through books and teachers. Jerusalem, a place where the various Jewish schools of thought meet and whose libraries hold inestimable treasures, is an essential stage in my work.

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